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ABSTRACT

In an effort to improve understanding of possible racial differences in attainment levels and mobility attitudes, data derived from the 3rd wave of a 3 wave study of southern rural youth (1966, 1968, and 1972) was limited to analysis of 695 black and white males who were by 1972 four years beyond expected high school completion. Attainment indicators included occupation, education, and income, while attitudinal indicators included occupational and educational orientations, perceived well-being, and perceived goal blockage. Obtained primarily via personal interview, data revealed that: (1) for occupations and education among both black and white respondents, aspirational levels exceeded corresponding expectational levels which, in turn, exceeded attainment levels; (2) aspiration and expectation levels of blacks were lower than those of whites, with the exception of comparable educational aspirations; (3) blacks had consistently lower levels of attainment; (4) both blacks and whites were optimistic about their future relative to their present life situation, perceiving the present as improvement over past well-being; and (5) blacks more frequently perceived factors hindering attainment of the occupational goals (lack of job opportunities and financial aid for education ranked as major limiting factors). (JC)

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EARLY ACHIEVEMENT PATTERNS OF SOUTHERN MALES: RACIAL PROFILES OF STATUS ATTAINMENT AND MOBILITY ATTITUDES*

by

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ABSTRACT

Utilizing data from a southern, non-metropolitan youth study (S-81), this paper reports the early patterns of mobility attitudes and status attainment for black and white males. Descriptive comparisons of the data incorporate multiple indicators of attainment levels and of attitudes. The attainment indicators include occupation, education, and income, while the attitudinal indicators are occupational and educational orientations, perceived well-being, and perceived goal blockage. The analyses of data generally reveal greater attainment differences than attitudinal differences between races.

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EARLY ACHIEVEMENT PATTERNS OF SOUTHERN MALES: RACIAL PROFILES OF STATUS ATTAINMENT AND MOBILITY ATTITUDES[1]

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The sociological concern for status attainment and the associated interest in adolescent mobility attitudes has resulted in a wealth of recent reports (Sewell, Haller and Portes, 1969; Sewell, Haller and Ohlendorf, 1970; Carter, 1973; Porter, 1974; and Alexander and Eckland, 1974). These studies taken collectively form a framework that systematically links structural and social psychological explanations when analyzing attainment. This framework can be viewed as a three phased process model in which relatively fixed background variables exert influences that are mediated by intervening sets of interpersonal and attitudinal variables on status attainment. In the Sewell studies, for example, the background influences of parental socio-economic statuses and intelligence on early adult occupational attainment are assessed through the intervening factors of academic performance, significant other influences, status aspirations and educational attainment. These analyses not only indicate that a great deal of the variation in attainment can be associated with this complex of variables, but also that a substantial part of the effects of social origins are indirect through the intervening social psychological influences.

The intent of this paper is not the general process modeling of status attainment; rather it is concerned with the descriptive analysis of variables shown to be significant in prior attainment research. Moreover, it should be viewed as a preparatory phase leading to our ultimate concern - the construction of a general attainment model. As a first step toward this goal this paper will descriptively profile attainment levels and mobility attitudes of black and white males utilizing data from the southern, non-metropolitan youth study (S-81). This descriptive format will improve our basic understanding of possible racial differences in attainment patterns.

Our descriptive analysis will differ from the concern of current status attainment research in one major respect. Instead of investigating the relationship between adolescent status aspirations and subsequent adult achievement, we shall investigate both attitudes and attainments observed during the early adult period. More specifically, we shall be making racial comparisons

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of early adult occupation, education, and income levels as indicators of status attainment and occupational and educational aspirations and expectations as indicators of mobility attitudes. Additionally, we shall examine the racial differences in perceived well-being and perceived goal blockage as indicators of the effects of any disparity between attitudes and attainment.

ASPIRATIONS, EXPECTATIONS AND STATUS ATTAINMENT

The organizing concepts that form the base in our descriptive analysis are aspirations, expectations and status attainment. The first two concepts are treated as special cases of general status orientations in that they explicitly refer only to future orientations. The distinction between aspirations and expectations closely follows the conceptualizations proposed by Kuvlesky and Bealer (1966) for occupational statuses. From this perspective, aspirations and expectations are treated as distinct phenomena, which can be differentiated both conceptually and empirically (Cosby, et al. 1974, review over sixty empirical studies using this distinction). Aspirations refer to an individual's desiring or wanting a status object (occupations and education in this report) and can be outlined with three components: (1) a chooser or selector element; (2) an orientation toward attainment; and (3) a status's object or objects. The fundamental difference between aspirations and expectations is the nature of the orientational component. Although both are future oriented, this component of aspirations is essentially positive, a wanting or a desiring element; whereas, the projective element of expectations may be either negative or positive. This conceptual distinction is important since an individual need not necessarily desire his anticipated or expected status. Somewhat divergent treatment of this can be found in Haller and Miller (1971) and Picou and Curry (1971). The remaining concept, status attainment, refers to ego's actual attainment of some status object.

The significance of our research problem can be approached by reviewing several findings from related research. (1) Several studies have reported a relatively high correlation between adolescent, educational, occupational aspirations and their subsequent level of status attainment. Sewell et al., (1970) report correlation coefficients ranging from .65 to .72 between senior-year educational aspirations and educational attainment (seven years later) for six residential groupings. Similar results are reported between occupational aspirations and occupational attainment. To emphasize the strength of this relationship, these attitudinal variables yielded higher correlations with attainment than did parental socio-economic status, mental ability, academic performance, and significant other influence. (2) Although there is a substantial amount of covariation between adolescent attitudes and attainment, the actual level of aspiration tends to be considerably higher than anticipated attainment levels. In a study of approximately 6,000 deep South high-school students, about sixty percent of both black and white youth aspired to either professional, technical, managerial or glamour occupations (Cosby, 1971). Even the more disadvantaged youth expressed remarkably high aspirations. For example, approximately 65% of the rural, black students from lower socio-economic homes with broken families had high level aspirations. Such findings suggest that there is a large reservoir of aspirations even among the most disadvantaged youth and that these aspirations seem unrealistic in terms of available opportunities. (3) Thus, the following question can be posed:

If adolescent attitudes have a substantial effect upon early adult attainment and yet these same attitudes are substantially higher than the actual attainment, what happens to these attitudes during the adult period in light of an actualized lower attainment. In short, what is the relationship between adult aspirations and attainment? (4) It is also axiomatic that white attainment exceeds that of blacks, especially in the deep South, and that a great divergence exists between adolescent aspirations and adult attainment. This suggests that a racial comparison should be made between aspirations and attainment during the early adult period to assess the magnitude of the difference which is thought to occur.

DATA COLLECTION

The data utilized in this research was obtained from a three wave panel (1966-1968-1972) of non-metropolitan, southern youth. The panel consists of 1228 students who were originally high school sophomores in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas in 1966-1967. Our analysis is concerned only with the black and white male subset (N = 695) and utilizes only the third wave data. The third wave contact was made in 1972 when most of the original respondents were four years beyond expected high-school completion. The data for this period were primarily obtained by personal interviews. Mailed questionnaires and telephone interviews were used for a minority (approximately 10%) of the respondents who were not interviewed by the primary method. The principle causes of panel attrition are attributable to out-of-state migration and military service.

ADULT ASPIRATIONS, EXPECTATIONS AND ATTAINMENT

Occupation

Table 1 indicates the levels of occupational aspirations, expectations and attainment for both black and white males, four years after expected high school graduation. An examination of the table reveals several strong and consistent patterns. First, the percentage of males aspiring to high status occupations was substantially larger than the comparable figures for expectations and attainment. In addition, expectations were significantly higher than attainment. This pattern was found for both black and white populations. It may prove illustrative to detail the figures for the professional category. For blacks, 37% aspired, 24% expected, and only 1.6% had attained a professional position. Whereas, for whites, 48% aspired, 30% expected, and 10% had attained such occupations.

A second strong pattern observed in Table 1 was for white aspirations to exceed black aspirations, for white expectations to exceed black expectations, and for white attainment to exceed black attainment. Using the managerial category as an example, 16% of the blacks and 28% of the whites aspired, 11% of the blacks and 27% of the whites expected, and 1.5% of the blacks and 9% of the whites attained managerial occupations. This consistent pattern also held for the professional-technical occupations.

In Table 2, the percent difference between aspirations-attainment and expectations-attainment is reported for both racial groupings. Although the

differences between aspired and attained occupations is considerable between blacks and whites (a slightly greater than 20% racial difference for both categories), the "gap" between aspirations or expectations and attainment was almost identical for blacks and whites. About 43% (B = 42.2%, W = 43.8%) were aspiring to middle-class occupational categories but had not attained this level in their early occupational career. Similarly, about 25% (B = 25.3%, W = 24.1%) expected to attain middle-class level occupations but had not done so. These figures suggest a possible "mirroring effect" where aspirational and expectational attitudes exceed attainment by a constant gap. Whether this finding holds for other populations is, of course, problematic, but it does suggest an interesting relationship between achievement attitudes and corresponding behavior.

Additionally, it should be stated that the rationale for including students with the managerial and professional attainment categories was based on two considerations. First there was no category for either aspirational or expectational attitudes concerning occupations, hence no direct possibility for comparison with attainment. Second, since the student category implied full-time training at the post high school level, we are inferring that this education is a means toward the attainment of a middle class occupation.

Education

The percentage distributions of educational aspirations, expectations and attainment appear in Table 3. As had been the case with the occupational analysis, there was a systematic pattern among the primary variables. Again, aspirational levels exceeded expectational levels which, in turn, exceeded attainment-holding for both the black and white sub-populations. For example, if we group those in the four-year college and graduate categories, we find that among blacks about 65% aspire, 37% expect, and %5 have attained this level of educational achievement. Similar figures for the whites were 70% aspire, 50% expect and 14% attained such achievement. There is an obviously large discrepancy between attitudes and attainment for both blacks and whites. A cautionary note should be interjected in that Table 3 has reference only to completed educational level. We know from our analysis in Table 1 that about 8% of the blacks and 14% of the whites were still in school and thus the level of attainment would be expected to increase somewhat over that observed in our third wave observations. Even with this additional attainment, both aspirations and expectations would still greatly surpass attainment.

The racial differences in levels of educational responses were more complex than found for occupations. Aspirational levels for blacks and whites did not differ substantially - about the same percentages aspired respectively to each of the educational categories. At the expectational level, however, racial differences could be discerned. Blacks were less likely to expect either high level educational attainment (college or greater) or low level attainment (high school or less). At the high level, 17% of the blacks expected to attain a college degree, whereas 29% of the whites expected to do so. The greatest categorical response for blacks was to expect trade, business or vocational training (blacks = 46%, whites = 28%). Pertaining to attainment, the pattern of lower attainment of blacks relative to whites reappeared. When blacks (26%)

in our panel did report post-high school educational training, it tended to be of the trade, vocational, military type. Whites, however, were found to have higher proportions who had graduated from both junior and four year colleges.

Income

The S-81 data set also has present level of income which can be used as an additional indicator of early attainment. Unfortunately comparable aspirations and expectations concerning income was not obtained. Table 4 provides a racial comparison of blacks and whites by weekly income categories. As had been the case with occupational and educational attainment, blacks had lower levels of income attainment. The average weekly income for blacks was about $106 as compared to $123 for whites. Also, it should be pointed out again that 8% of the blacks and 14% of the whites were still in school and, thus, not realizing their income potential. It can be argued that once this higher percentage of educated whites enter the labor force the racial income disparity will increase.

OTHER ATTITUDE ORIENTATIONS

To this point in our analysis, we have developed several profiles with regard to black and white aspiration and expectation attitudes and attainment. One of these has been a consistent and sharp difference between attitudinal levels and attainment levels. This phenomenon can be related at the individual level to such concepts as "anticipatory occupational frustration" (Glick, 1963) or "anticipatory goal deflection" (Kuvlesky and Ohlendorf, 1968) and "occupational goal deflection" (Sollie and Lightsey, 1974). It is possible that the sharp disparity between attitudes and attainment could have detrimental effects upon the adjustment of the young adults in this population. It would seem in the long run that the attitudes would have to become more in line with realistic possibilities. If this were occurring at the early adult stage of development, one might anticipate a pessimism about the future. To investigate this possibility we have utilized a measure of perceived well-being which compares the respondent's retrospective estimate of his overall life situation four years prior to the interview, at the present time of the interview, and his projections five years hence. This was accomplished by asking him to rate his perception on a scale of one (worst possible life) to ten (best possible life). These figures, which are reported in Table 5, reveal a pattern in contradiction to that of increasing pessimism. The majority of the respondents indicated that their overall well-being was generally poorer four years prior to our interview than their current well-being; and, interestingly, they perceived a marked improvement in their well-being five years into the future. The consistency of this pattern was overwhelming for both racial groupings as shown by the "blocked" numbers in Table 5.

A second method of investigating the disparity between attitudes and attainment was to examine the responses to a set of items designed to measure their perception of factors that would hinder the attainment of their desired occupation. These items included: finances, educational background, parental interest, race, residential mobility, job scarcity, community opportunities,

occupational knowledge, intellectual abilities, and local educational facilities (Table 6). On nine of these ten items, blacks gave higher responses, which reflect greater perception of these items as obstacles to their occupational goal attainment. This finding is in general agreement with the consistent lower levels of attainment observed in the first part of this paper. Such items as community opportunities, job scarcity, and finances were ranked as the greatest obstacles by both blacks and whites.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The descriptive findings of this report can be summarized around five general points.

(1) In the aggregate, aspirational levels were found to exceed the corresponding expectational levels, which, in turn, exceeded the attainment levels of the various status variables. This pattern held for both occupations and education in both black and white sub-populations.

(2) The aspiration and expectation levels of blacks were lower than the comparable levels for whites - with the exception that educational aspiration levels were roughly identical for both races. A comparison of occupational attitudes and attainment suggested that attitudes "mirrored" attainment to about the same degree for both sub-populations.

(3) Blacks were consistently found to have lower levels of attainment using alternately occupational, educational and income indicators.

(4) Both blacks and whites were found to be optimistic about their future relative to their present life situation and that the present was a perceived improvement over their prior or past well-being.

(5) Blacks were found to be more likely to perceive factors hindering the attainment of their occupational goals. Lack of job opportunities and financial aid for education were ranked as major limiting factors.

TABLE 1: Percent Occupational Aspirations, Expectations, and Attainment for Black and White Males Four Years After Expected High School Graduation

	Blacks			Whites		
	Aspirations (N=264)[a]	Expectations (N=258)[b]	Attainment (N =259)[c]	Aspirations (N=420)[d]	Expectations (N=414)[e]	Attainment (N=420)[f]
Unemployed	--	--	0.4	--	--	1.7
Student	--	--	7.7	--	--	13.6
Labor	2.3	7.7	21.6	0.0	3.6	9.3
Skilled and Semi-Skilled	34.1	51.2	57.5	19.5	31.9	47.1
Sales and Clerical	10.6	6.2	9.7	4.3	6.8	9.5
Managerial	15.9	10.5	1.5	28.3	27.3	8.8
Professional (Technical)	37.1	24.4	1.6	47.9	30.4	10.0
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

[a]No information for 4 Blacks

[b]No information for 10 Blacks

[c]No information for 9 Blacks

[d]No information for 7 Whites

[e]No information for 13 Whites

[f]No information for 7 Whites

TABLE 2: The Percent Differences Between Early Adult Attitudes and Attainment[a]

	Aspirations	- Attainment	= Difference	Expectations	- Attainment	= Difference
White Middle Class (Professionals, Managerials and Students)	76.2	32.4	43.8	57.7	32.4	25.3
Black Middle Class (Professionals, Managerials and Students)	53.0	10.8	42.2	34.9	10.8	24.1
Racial Difference	23.2	21.6	1.6	22.8	21.6	1.2

[a]Pooling based on percentages reported in Table 1 of this report.

TABLE 4: Weekly Income for Current Attained Occupation

Income ($)	Blacks[a] (N=221) %	Whites[b] (N=339) %
0	0.0	0.0
1-49	0.0	1.5
50-99	46.1	26.5
100-149	42.1	46.9
150-199	9.5	17.1
200-249	2.3	5.3
250+	0.0	2.7
TOTAL	100.0	100.0
MEAN	$105.75	$122.80

[a]No information for 47 Blacks

[b]No information for 88 Whites

TABLE 3: Percent Educational Aspirations, Expectations, and Attainment for Black and White Males Four Years After Expected High School Graduation

	Blacks			Whites		
	Aspirations (N=266)[a]	Expectations (N=263)[b]	Attainment (N=264)[c]	Aspirations (N=424)[d]	Expectations (N=419)[e]	Attainment (N=422)[f]
Some High School	0.0	0.0	3.8	0.0	1.0	2.6
High School	3.8	8.8	61.7	3.8	16.5	56.4
Trade, Business, Commercial or Vo-Tech Program[g]	25.9	46.0	26.1	22.6	27.9	18.7
Junior College	4.9	8.0	3.8	3.8	4.5	8.8
Graduate from 4 Year College	18.4	16.7	4.6	22.1	28.6	13.5
Graduate or Professional Degree	47.0	20.5	0.0	47.7	21.5	0.0
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

[a]No information for 2 Blacks

[b]No information for 5 Blacks

[c]No information for 4 Blacks

[d]No information for 3 Whites

[e]No information for 8 Whites

[f]No information for 5 Whites

[g]Attainment figures include trade, business, and technical training that are also acquired in the military.

TABLE 5: Past, Present and Projected Perceived Well-Being

Well-Being	Blacks			Whites[d]		
	Past[b] (N=266) %	Present[b] (N=266) %	Future[c] (N=265) %	Past (N=426) %	Present (N=426) %	Future (N=426) %
Worst Possible						
Life - 1	9.0	3.7	0.8	11.0	2.3	0.0
2	14.7	2.6	0.0	14.6	1.2	0.2
3	16.5	6.4	0.4	15.0	7.5	0.2
4	16.2	16.2	1.5	16.9	13.6	0.2
5	12.4	27.1	4.9	16.0	23.2	3.5
6	8.3	17.3	4.1	9.6	18.6	5.2
7	6.0	13.9	13.6	4.5	18.8	14.3
8	7.5	6.8	25.3	4.0	10.6	34.8
9	3.8	2.6	24.5	2.1	1.6	21.6
Best - 10	5.6	3.4	24.9	6.3	2.6	20.0
Possible Life						
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
MEAN	4.6	5.4	8.2	4.4	5.7	8.2

[a]The data presented was obtained from the following questions:
(1) Where on the ladder do you feel you personally stand at the present time?
(2) Where on the ladder would you say you stood four years ago?
(3) Where do you think you will be on the ladder five years from now?

[b]No information for 3 Blacks
[c]No information for 2 Blacks
[d]No information for 1 White

TABLE 6: Perception of Factors Blocking Attainment of Occupational Goals

Item	Blacks (N: AVE. 260)[b] $\bar{X}$	Whites (N: AVE. 422)[b] $\bar{X}$
Finances (For Education)	2.02	1.49
Educational Background	1.50	1.32
Parental Interest	1.25	1.08
Race	1.58	1.01
Residential Mobility	1.37	1.43
National Job Scarcity	2.13	1.71
Community Opportunities	2.35	1.93
Opportunity Knowledge	1.73	1.61
Intellectual Abilities	1.41	1.32
Local Educational Facilities	1.47	1.19

[a]Each item was presented in the form of a question. The original responses were closed-ended and indicated as 1 - not at all, 2 - some, 3 - much, 4 - very much. The respondent circled whichever applied for that particular question/item.

[b]The number (N) of responses for each question/item varied.

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